DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 446 833 PS 028 954

AUTHOR Bruning, Merribeth D.
TITLE Positive, Peaceful Interactions between Adults and Young Children. Growing Together: Building a Peaceful Community.
PUB DATE 2000-00-00
NOTE 9p.; Adapted from paper presented at the 2000 Early Childhood Conference (South Bend, IN, March 4, 2000).
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Child Rearing; Classroom Environment; Classroom Techniques; *Conflict Resolution; Early Childhood Education; Family Environment; *Parent Child Relationship; *Peace; *Problem Solving; *Teacher Student Relationship; *Young Children
IDENTIFIERS Adult Child Relationship; *Peace Education

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses classroom practices contributing to positive, peaceful interactions between adults and young children. The paper begins with reminders about the development of self-control as a crucial aspect of peacefulness, the role of the toddler's developing autonomy, and the development of a sense of fairness in prekindergarten children. The paper notes the importance of positive adult role models who have a daily quiet time, engage in meditation or prayer, and are mindful of their vocal inflection and body language. Suggestions for fostering peaceful environments are given, including using visual reminders, having orderly homes and classrooms, providing aesthetic experiences that promote peace, telling stories about problem solving, and limiting and monitoring television viewing. Inappropriate strategies for dealing with conflict are delineated, including the avoidance of threats, physical reactions, name calling, bringing up the past, and inattentive listening. Appropriate strategies are described, such as identifying the real problems, and demonstrating mutual respect for everyone's feelings. Also noted are procedures to help adults keep perspective as they help children work through steps of conflict resolution. The paper concludes by asserting that peace starts with positive interactions at home, in the community, and at school, and that each individual has the responsibility to respond, rather than react, to conflict. (KB)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 446 833

PS

Material adapted from a presentation for

The 2000 Early Childhood Conference

Indiana University South Bend

March 4, 2000

Growing Together:

Building a Peaceful Community

POSITIVE, PEACEFUL INTERACTIONS BETWEEN ADULTS AND YOUNG CHILDREN

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Merribeth D. Bruning

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

Presented by:

Merribeth D. Bruning, Ed.D.
Associate Professor and Program Director for Elementary Education
Indiana University South Bend

PS 028954

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Positive, Peaceful Interactions Between Adults and Young Children

As the song states, "Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me...," (Miller & Jackson) peaceful interactions start with an inward look. As individuals examine why they respond in the way they do, it is possible to look at ways to respond more peacefully. Peace is not just the absence of conflict. Peace is defined by Webster's (1999) as "...a state of harmony between people or groups; ...a state of tranquility or serenity." In a discussion about positive, peaceful interactions between adults and young children it is beneficial to remember some aspects of child development when creating such harmony.

Child Development Reminders

Self-control is a crucial aspect of peacefulness. Self-control begins in *infancy* and is a life-long skill. Erikson (Fields & Boesser, 1998) stated that infancy is the time in which the child establishes a sense of trust or mistrust. As the physical and emotional needs of the infant are met, the child establishes expectations and begins the process of self-regulation. Positive expectations and feelings of trust begin to emerge. The child learns self-regulation as part of the outgrowth of trust. As the child grows behaviors of adults serve as models for coping. Adults who model self-control assist the child in monitoring personal behavior.

As the ***toddler*** establishes autonomy using the terms "no" and "mine" often with vehemence, the adult needs to remain an adult. The adult can guide the child by establishing a supportive emotional and physical environment in which words are used to express needs and desires positively.

PreK-Primary aged children begin to develop rules and a sense of fairness. As their vocabulary expands, they have more words to express their feelings. Supportive discussions can assist children with the use of words to solve problems. As the child develops reasoning ability and language the steps for conflict resolution can be taught.

Positive Adult Models

Adults provide the role models from which the child patterns behavior. To be the ideal role model is difficult. However, a daily quiet time for the adult is very important in dealing with the challenges of life. This is particularly true of life with lively, curious, delightful young children who are busy discovering as much as possible about the planet and the persons who inhabit it! Children take much energy and fill life with such joy. Meditation/prayer on the part of the adult can help the adult to remain tranquil and peaceful in spite of conflicts that

are bound to arise with the child. Children benefit from a quiet time in their day, too, in addition to naps.

Vocal inflection and body language are significant aspects of communication with young children. Pets know by the tone of voice whether or not their masters are pleased with them. How much more so do children note our approval or reproof! Language is powerful. Even when children do not fully understand the meaning of some words, it is important to choose words and inflection carefully. Adults model use of language skills and communicate expectations verbally. Positive adult models help the child learn to use words to express feelings rather than resorting to physical reactions to events.

Creating Peaceful Environments

Peaceful environments can be fostered with the conflict resolution strategies outlined. Peaceful environments can be further enhanced by:

- **Visual reminders** such as pictures that show diverse individuals working and playing together and serene, calm landscapes or abstracts that use soothing colors and lines. Young children show preferences for faces, particularly of faces of immediate family. Choose pictures that invoke positive feelings.

- **Orderly homes and classrooms promote harmony**. Having a place for things and a routine promotes a tranquil environment.

- **Provide aesthetic experiences for children that promote peace.** The beauty of nature; the shape of sculpture; the line and colors of paintings (as mentioned above); the sounds and textures of beautiful music in many styles from the J.S. Bach *Brandenburg Concerti*, Mozart Piano Sonatas, Mariachi Bands, and Koto selections, lullabies or various other pieces from around the world; and even the aesthetic of food prepared simply and presented well; all matter to young children. Children respond to beauty, especially when adults around them provide guidance to help them observe the beauty of the seasons in the spring green of grass; the red, orange, and yellow of autumn; the white of new fallen snow; the rainbow in a drop of dew; the delicacy of a flower in bloom; the colors in a rock; the grain of wood; the variety of timbre in musical instruments; or the stroke of the brush of the artist. Children also respond to the arts and architecture with a sense of awe. The aesthetics strike a part of our inner selves and speak to us of harmony and peace. As we help children find inner peace, they are more likely to act more peaceably with themselves and interact more peacefully with others.

- **Provide stories about problem solving.** Check with local librarians for appropriate stories for children with themes about peace. Write stories about peaceful solutions to problems using the names of the children in your family or community and let the children illustrate the stories. Discuss ways to bring peaceful resolution to family disagreements before they happen.

- **Limit and monitor television viewing**. Numerous studies link television viewing, even in television for children with aggression and violence. (Marian, 1999).

Strategies for Dealing with Conflict

Even in prepared and supportive environments, conflicts do arise. Children can exhibit behaviors that are upsetting to adults. When children and/or others do experience conflict, it is important for the adult to attempt to determine why the conflict has ensued. It is also important to avoid the following behaviors:

- **Avoid making threats.** Threats are counterproductive. If you threaten and then regret or repent, then the child finds you inconsistent. While not following through on the threat is wise, it is true wisdom to avoid making a threat in the first place.

- **Physical reactions are inappropriate.** Hitting, pushing, spanking, using physical force are not appropriate behaviors to settle problems for individuals of any age. Research shows that spanking builds resentment. Using force models that if you are bigger it is O.K. to use your size to solve a problem. This is not a message that teaches appropriate problem solving.

- **Name calling, sneering, "put downs"** are inappropriate use of language and they hurt even a young child. Adults have been heard to say, "Oh, you are being a baby!" or "You are a (some negative term)." Children may not grasp the full significance, but they do feel the "put down". Life is challenging enough. Adults need to support the child, not belittle the child.

- **Bringing up the past** is not productive. A child may not readily remember the cause of the tantrum from last week. Children tend to live more in the present. Individuals of all ages do not like to be reminded of past wrongs.

- **Bossing and inattentive listening** does not model respectful, peaceful interaction. Tape recording the conversations between an adult and child

can help one assess the degree of attention and positive interaction between the adult and child.

- **Getting even** is not an adult response to conflict. Children need a supportive adult who can positively guide and assist the child with problem solving skills. "Getting even" is counterproductive in adult-to-adult relationships as well.

Address Conflict Positively

Admission of the problem can lead to steps to resolve the issue positively by thinking and acting on a series of steps that lead to conflict resolution (Deuschle, 2000).

1) **Identify the real problem** (Fields & Boesser, 1998, p. 149.) The behavior that leads to the conflict may simply be symptomatic. Try to find the underlying cause of the conflict. If it is an adult *vs.* child situation, try to determine if the child is choosing to disobey by wearing a different outfit; or is the child simply registering autonomy and pride in being able to dress him/herself? The adult needs to ask if there is a reason for the behavior and choice. Is the problem really important?

2) **Recognize that conflicts are natural, unavoidable, and even at times healthy.** People have their own ideas at *all ages*. Young children begin to express their personhood early in life. Expressing oneself is an important aspect of becoming an individual with critical thinking skills. The expression of the child may not be in a manner that is satisfying to the adult. For example, the child may have a profound preference for one outfit over another, and make that preference known.

3) **Think, listen, and observe in order to attack the problem, not the person.** Ask the child to explain a choice or behavior even in the beginning stages of language development. This reinforces the power of language, helps the child self-reflect, and provides insight for the adult as to the motivation of the child. Asking why the child chose the blue shirt instead of the red shirt, that the adult had planned for the child to wear may lead to a comment that the "tag in the red shirt itches." Look for patterns to the behavior. Then child may not have the language skills or self-awareness to report discomfort.

4) **Demonstrate mutual respect for the feelings of all**. Allow the child to attempt to state why the child is making the choice. In a calm voice and

manner, the adult can use words and gestures to explain that it is wonderful that the child can distinguish various colors. However, the red shirt goes better with the rest of the outfit, and that the itchy tag can be removed; or that everyone in the family is dressing in a special way for the family photo; or that it is too cold outside to wear the summer shirt; or that the child has grown so much the other shirt no longer fits. Give a rational, calm, factual explanation of why the other choice is preferred by the adult. When possible, try to provide two choices that are appropriate and then abide by the choice of the child (Hildebrand & Hearron, p. 103-104).

5) **Remember that the adult must decide and model an appropriate adult *response*, not a *reaction*.** Each individual must take responsibility for his/her own actions. Particularly when dealing with young children, the adult needs to model self-control and positive responses. As noted, the child can be given a simple choice to make by deciding between two choices that are acceptable to the adult. Otherwise, a compromise can be arranged. For example, "You may wear this shirt for now and we will change before the photo." Or, if the child has provided a reasonable explanation and positive solution, it is appropriate to allow the choice of the child. It is good to state that the child has made a good point. Children need to learn to reason and to discuss to make appropriate choices throughout life. However, it is important to set reasonable limits (Hildebrand, p. 15).

Further Guides for Dealing with Conflict

When conflicts arise, adults and/or children respond and react uniquely. The strategies for coping with conflict are for some withdrawal, while others become more aggressive and attempt to achieve goals through force "no matter what". Some individuals are prone to yield to a stronger individual. Others compromise to reach agreement. The healthiest response to conflict is to problem-solve and negotiate to find a solution that allows both parties to fully meet their goals and maintain a relationship at the highest level.

As one is working through the steps of conflict resolution, it is important to keep some perspective. Developmentally, adults are supposed to be more capable of this than children. However, some cautions need to be heeded. The following procedures can be helpful:

- **Face the situation** and do not ignore a problem unless you determine it is not important.

- **Be consistent** with young children. What is not important today and is extremely important tomorrow can be very confusing to the child. If there is a concern, address it consistently. It is possible to be consistent and to allow the child some choice.

- **Work for Win-Win negotiations** and avoid win-lose negotiations, otherwise known as arguments. For example, giving the child a choice of two shirts that are acceptable teaches the child to make decisions, shows respect for the child's opinion, and allows for a positive resolution of the conflict. As you discuss the problem briefly with the child, ask questions. The child may want to "make a deal" with you as you negotiate a solution. Within reason, this can teach the child the value of negotiating!

- **Problem-solve** by assessing actions for smoothing and soothing. Brainstorm solutions to the problem. In the clothing example, the adult might ask, "If you wear this shirt now, what shirt can you wear for the family photo later today?"

- **Communicate always and compromise at least sometimes**. Children need to be compliant, and they need to also have initiative. Sometimes their ideas about what shirt is best may actually have merit! Children often feel powerless and that can lead to more negative behavior. Children who feel valued generally behave more positively.

- **Forgive and forget** because at some point we all need to start fresh and being anew. Put the issue to rest and go on from here. Next time, the adult can provide a positive choice sooner and avoid a problem. All concerned can move forward rather than getting "stuck" in the conflict.

Conclusion

Peace on earth starts with the positive interactions in families and homes; in neighborhoods; in centers with caregivers and peers; in schools with teachers and students. While there are reasons to disagree with other adults and with children, each individual has a responsibility to *respond* to conflict rather than to *react* to conflict. Using the steps outlined, the opportunity for positive, peaceful interaction is enhanced. A closing challenge for all adult-child interaction is to "Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me" (Miller & Jackson).

References

Dueschle, C. (February, 2000). Conflict resolution. Personal interview. School of Education. Indiana University South Bend, South Bend, Indiana.

Fields, M. V. & Boesser, C. (1998). Constructive guidance and discipline (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Hildebrand, V. & Hearron, P. F. (1999). Guiding young children (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Marion, M. (1999). Guidance of young children (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Miller, S. & Jackson J. (1983) *Let There Be Peace on Earth,* in *Chalice Hymnal p. 677.* Chalice Press, St. Louis (1995).

Random House Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (1999) Random House, Inc. New York.